

TESTIMONY OF  
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ASSOCIATION OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS –  
CWA, AFL-CIO  
BEFORE  
THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
SECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
PROTECTION OF THE HOMELAND SECURITY  
COMMITTEE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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Thank you Chairwoman Jackson-Lee, and the members of this Subcommittee, for giving me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Patricia Friend and I am the International President of the largest flight attendant union in the world, the Association of Flight Attendants – CWA (AFA-CWA). AFA-CWA represents flight attendants at 20 airlines with over 55,000 members. Our members work onboard airline operations from the largest, international flights to small, regional service in thousands of communities across this country. It was our members, flying partners and friends that were the first victims to die horrible, brutal deaths at the hands of terrorists on September 11<sup>th</sup> while performing their duties with professionalism. Today, flight attendants remain as the only front line first responders guaranteed to be in the cabin of every single passenger aircraft operating in this county. Considering those two facts, you'd think that we would have been among the first to be given the tools and training to protect ourselves, our passengers and the aircraft. Unfortunately, Congress and the Administration have failed to take the necessary steps to make that possible.

I hope that my testimony today will help convince all the members of this Subcommittee that a glaring loophole in our aviation security remains and that more must be done to close that dangerous loophole. I'm here to tell you that for the over 100,000 flight attendants in this country, very little has changed since the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. While this Congress and the Administration have taken steps for airline pilots, who are now safely barricaded behind reinforced cockpit doors and are in some cases armed with guns, and air marshals are on a higher percentage of flights then before September 11<sup>th</sup>, flight attendants are left in the passenger cabin with no meaningful training or tools. This is an unacceptable situation and one which we, many aviation security experts and the 9-11 Commission have been urging a change to for well over six years now.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, I was appointed by then Secretary of Transportation, Norman Mineta, to his Rapid Response Team for Aircraft Security, a group of industry experts assembled to recommend aircraft security improvements. The members of this team were appointed in order to bring our collective experience together to attempt to address what we viewed as the glaring loopholes that were exploited by the 9-11 terrorists. One of those identified loopholes was the inadequate and outdated training provided to flight attendants. The report for the Rapid Response Team called for a meaningful and comprehensive update for flight attendant security training to reflect the current threat environment, as did the staff report accompanying the 9-11 Commission.

It was clear that the flight attendant anti-hijacking and security training provided by the carriers was outdated, inadequate and in major need of revision to reflect the current security threats posed by terrorist attacks onboard aircraft. Previous training that called for flight attendants to be cooperative with terrorists that were hoping to land a plane somewhere to negotiate for the release of hostages was clearly no longer the situation flight attendants would face in another Al-Qaeda attack onboard an aircraft. The threat posed to flight attendants, passengers and the aircraft changed and our training needed to reflect the new reality.

What we have repeatedly asked for is to update our training to include a number of important facets. Among them are basic self defense maneuvers to allow for us to defend ourselves against a terrorist attack. We are not asking, as some have tried to portray it, to be certified black belt martial arts experts. We are simply asking for a basic level of meaningful training to protect ourselves and slow down any terrorist attack. Also included would be training on crew communication and coordination. Currently, there is no comprehensive training or explanation of what the three components of in-flight security – flight attendants, pilots and air marshals - are trained to do in case of an attack. Clearly, these three groups must be trained on how to work together as a team to be as effective as possible. Unfortunately, that is not happening.

Ever since 9-11, AFA-CWA has been engaged in aggressive and repeated legislative efforts to enact legislation to provide the meaningful training that we need. Unfortunately, our efforts have been thwarted by airline management – which is more interested in the financial bottom line rather than meaningful security efforts – as well as refusal and outright stonewalling by federal agencies.

I have prepared an outline for the Subcommittee on our various legislative efforts since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

#### **Air Transportation Security Act (ATSA)**

Our first legislative efforts were undertaken in Congress during drafting and debate of the Air Transportation Security Act (ATSA) in the fall of 2001. The final legislation approved by Congress included provisions that required the FAA to update and improve flight attendant security training requirements. These provisions called on the FAA to require that air carrier flight attendant training programs be updated and changed to reflect the current security and hijacking situations that flight attendants may face onboard the aircraft. It was AFA-CWA's intention and belief by ensuring that the FAA approve these updated programs, all carriers across the industry would implement similar, if not identical, training programs.

However, in the immediate months after passage of ATSA it became abundantly clear that the security training programs being implemented by the carriers and approved by the FAA were not adequate or consistent. There was a wide variance in the type of training and the hours spent on the training. Some carriers were showing flight attendants a twenty minute video, while others were conducting two full days of mandatory, hands-on training. These discrepancies in the security training in the aviation system led to many flight attendants unprepared for any future terrorist attack onboard an aircraft. We have stated repeatedly that all flight attendants, regardless of the carrier employing them, must receive the same level of security training.

It was at this time that we began to urge Congress to change the requirements for flight attendant security training to include a provision that mandated a set number of hours for the security training. These mandates would have to be enforced so that all carriers would be required to provide the same level of adequate security training for all flight attendants. AFA-CWA still believes that this is the best requirement for training.

### **Arming Pilots Legislation**

During the spring of 2002, as legislation began moving in the House and Senate that would allow pilots to carry fire arms, AFA-CWA asked that Congress mandate 28 hours of detailed flight attendant security training at all carriers, with the training requirements and guidelines to be developed by the Transportation Security Agency (TSA). In the House, AFA-CWA worked closely with Representative Steve Horn (R-CA) to introduce an amendment in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to the Arming Pilots Legislation that would mandate 28 hours of detailed flight attendant security training. At the last minute, Representative Horn did not offer the amendment after discussions with the Chair and Ranking Member in the hope that language would be included in the final bill before reaching the House floor. Eventually, a provision was included in the final version that passed that House requiring TSA to develop detailed flight attendant security training requirements that must be followed by all carriers, but not mandating 28 hours specifically.

In the Senate, Senators Bob Smith (R-NH) and Barbara Boxer (D-CA) included AFA-CWA's ideal provisions mandating 28 hours of detailed flight attendant security training in their Arming Pilots Legislation. As the Senate debated amendments to the Homeland Security Act on September 5<sup>th</sup> of 2002, we were successful in convincing a majority of Senators to support the amendment and succeeded in including the provisions in the Homeland Security Act.

### **Homeland Security Act**

The House version of Homeland Security did not include provisions on arming pilots or flight attendant security training. While the bill was being finalized in the Homeland Security Act Conference Committee, AFA-CWA urged the Committee to support the Senate version of the language, but we were ultimately unsuccessful in having the mandated 28 hours of training included. The final legislation did include language that would require TSA to issue a rule mandating a set number of hours for extensively detailed flight attendant security training that must be implemented by all carriers and mandatory for all flight attendants.

While not completely satisfied with the final language, we began to work closely with TSA and those developing the training curriculum and guidelines in order to guarantee that the training requirements and the final rule issued by the TSA would be as strong and comprehensive as possible.

### **Airline Management Efforts to Kill Flight Attendant Security Training**

Airline management has been strongly opposed to any efforts that would require them to abide by any industry wide training standards or a firm requirement on the number of hours required for training. To them, it has not been an issue of security, but an issue of bottom line profit. They have fought AFA-CWA every step of the way and have even

attempted a number of back door efforts to completely gut requirements for flight attendant security training.

In the spring of 2003, they attempted to insert a provision into the Omnibus Appropriations Act that would make any flight attendant security training required by TSA voluntary. They had also worked consistently to legislate that any flight attendant security training be made voluntary, make the flight attendants pay for the training themselves and prevent industry wide standards for the security training or eliminate it completely.

### **Vision 100 - FAA Reauthorization**

In 2003, as the House worked on its version of the Vision – 100 FAA Reauthorization, the carriers continued in their efforts to gut flight attendant security training. Early in the process, AFA-CWA was approached by certain carriers about possibly reaching a compromise on the issue that could be acceptable to all. It was abundantly clear to flight attendant labor unions that we could either negotiate with the committee on language that we could live with or take our chances with airline management forcing through their preferred language. Regardless of our support for the current law, it was clear that the Congressional leadership of the majority were intending to enact changes to flight attendant security training, at the request of airline management.

In the end, the final language included in the House FAA Reauthorization created a two tier approach to training. It created an advanced, voluntary training program and a basic, mandatory level of security training with the requirement that TSA must develop firm and specific guidelines for that training. It was our understanding that this compromise was a settled issue. Unfortunately, at the last minute, Continental Airlines went to Republican House Leader Tom DeLay and had him change one word in the security training provisions. He had the provision that said “TSA **shall** issue guidelines” changed to “TSA **may** issue guidelines”. By changing this one word, he took away the ability to force TSA to issue these guidelines. TSA, which has proven to be under the pressure of the carriers, would now not be required or mandated to issue meaningful guidelines for crucial, mandatory flight attendant security training.

Since enactment of that legislation, AFA-CWA has pursued various efforts to improve upon our security training. Unfortunately, we have been unsuccessful.

### **Current Status of Flight Attendant Security Training Programs**

Today, training provided to flight attendants remains unsatisfactory. It consists of the advanced, voluntary training program provided by TSA and basic mandatory training provided by the airlines themselves.

#### Advanced, voluntary training

Currently, the TSA has developed the advanced, voluntary portion of flight attendant security training. The training is conducted several times a year over three days at various community colleges around the country and focus on self defense training. At times, TSA has been slow in providing information on class locations and dates,

depressing turnout. It has also become increasingly difficult for our members to attend the training as it has become harder for them to find three consecutive days to take off from work. Also, with the recent rounds of bankruptcies in the airline industry and the resulting dramatic pay cuts, our members have found it difficult to pay for the necessary housing during these classes. Questions remain about the effectiveness of this training when it does not include a yearly recurrent training. This is a one time training that does not require a yearly “refresher” course. Further, AFA-CWA firmly believes that many of the provisions of this voluntary program should be integral parts of a basic, mandatory training program.

#### Basic, mandatory training

At this time, the basic mandatory security training for flight attendants is provided directly by the airlines themselves, with little oversight by the TSA. While Congress established the TSA to develop and oversee transportation security programs, according to the September 2005 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to Congress on flight attendant security training, TSA believes it is the individual air carriers themselves who are responsible for establishing performance goals for these training programs. Unfortunately, TSA’s inability to carry out its most basic oversight capabilities has resulted in a further watering down of flight attendant security training programs over the past several years.

In fact, reports from our Air Safety, Health and Security representatives at AFA-CWA represented carriers of all sizes indicate that security training has continually been watered down year after year. In fact, one of our members recently reported that instead of spending time on required security training, the airline instructor released the students in order to “take an early lunch”, neglecting to cover the required program. I have attached a summary of reports from our representatives on a number of AFA-CWA represented carriers, you can see how the training is again as varied and random as that which existed prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>.

The 2005 GAO report goes on to state that TSA has failed in its basic requirement to provide overall strategic goals for the carriers or to develop a framework from which to establish goals for the training. While TSA told the GAO that they planned on completing work on detailed guidance for airlines two years ago, to our knowledge, they have continued to fail in this most basic requirement.

Furthermore, TSA has been given the ability to periodically review and audit airline training programs. It is unclear how frequently TSA is actually undertaking this requirement. In fact, as the September 2005 GAO report stated, “although TSA officials stated that TSA inspectors reviewed all 84 air carriers’ revised security training curriculums in response to January 2002 guidance and the corresponding standards, TSA was only able to provide us documentation related to 11 reviews.”

Also, the Vision 100 FAA Reauthorization included a provision that required the TSA to consider complaints from flight attendants when determining when to conduct a review and audit of a carrier’s security training program. TSA representatives told the GAO that

they “were not aware of any instances in which crew members had complained to TSA” about the training programs. I can attest to the fact that this is not accurate. AFA-CWA members have written TSA to complain about the watering down and inadequacies of their training programs. Either TSA officials do not read their mail, or they were not truthful with GAO investigators.

The September 2005 GAO report is full of promises from the TSA to develop reporting guidelines, databases for the tracking of carrier training programs, a handbook to document procedures for TSA inspectors and reorganizing inspection staff into a newly created Office of Compliance. I urge this Committee to conduct the proper oversight to see if TSA has truly and completely followed through with their promises to the GAO over two years ago. While taking these steps still leaves the current security training woefully inadequate, it could help provide a level of consistency that is currently lacking in the industry.

I regret to inform the members of this Subcommittee that due to TSA inaction and lack of oversight, airline managements’ desire to streamline and cut training programs and lack of – to date – Congressional oversight, flight attendant security training programs are no more effective today as they were prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>.

### **Lack of Equipment to Enhance Aviation Security in the Aircraft Cabin**

As well as a lack of the most basic, meaningful security training for flight attendants, equipment for enhancing onboard aviation security is currently lacking. The most basic necessity onboard a passenger aircraft is the ability to communicate quickly, efficiently and clearly between the cabin and flight deck crew. With pilots safely barricaded behind their reinforced cockpit doors, and with instructions to limit exposure, it is crucial that a reliable and clear communication tool be provided for the aircraft crew to communicate with one another in an emergency situation.

Currently, the only communication device available for cabin and flight deck crew is the aircraft interphone. This is the telephone device that I’m sure you’ve all seen the flight attendants onboard the aircraft use to make announcements and to communicate with the cockpit. This device is inconvenient for a number of reasons. First, an inoperable interphone is not a reason to prevent an aircraft from departing for a scheduled flight. Second, the interphone is located in the galleys of the aircraft – all the way in the aft or in the front – making it very difficult to run to in an emergency situation if flight attendants are located throughout the cabin of the aircraft.

It should also be noted that when various federal agencies conducted a mock terrorist attack onboard an aircraft in June of 2005, referred to as “Operation Atlas”, one of the first things that the mock terrorists did was to cut the phone cord on the aft interphone, thereby restricting communication between the cabin and cockpit. Many crucial minutes passed before the cockpit crewmembers were even aware that anything had happened, giving the terrorists plenty of time to kill and injure various crewmembers and passengers. While this was a mere “mock” hijacking, such a possibility exists today.

AFA-CWA, along with other unions representing flight attendants at major carriers in this country have repeatedly called for a cost effective, wireless communication device for flight attendants to use onboard the aircraft. Such a device would provide flight attendants with the ability to notify pilots at the earliest possible moment of a problem. The technology is available today and has even being factored into the designs on the newer aircraft coming off the assembly lines at Boeing and Airbus. There are several different vendors in this country that have prepared just such a cost effective and functional device that could easily be integrated into the aircraft operating systems and could be installed on all U.S. commercial aircraft in a relatively short period of time. AFA-CWA believes that it is well past time that hands-free, discreet, wireless devices should be made mandatory for all flight attendants.

The need for such a device is not a new one that has only emerged post 9-11. In fact, in 1999, the White House directed the FAA to establish the Commercial Aviation Safety Team (CAST) to investigate numerous turbulence injuries that were occurring onboard aircraft. That year, the CAST Committee began working on a bi-directional wireless communications system for pilots and flight attendants. The system was needed because at times of spur-of-the-moment turbulence, the pilots could not ensure that flight attendants would hear a public address warning over the cabin intercom. In addition, numerous cases of flight attendant and passenger injuries due to turbulence could not be communicated to the pilots because the flight attendants were unconscious on the floor with no means of communicating. Studies reviewed by CAST showed that wireless notification would result in huge savings for air carriers with fewer flight attendant on-duty injuries. The business case based on this is available.

The events of 9-11 clearly demonstrated that a more reliable form of communication, other than cabin interphones, is needed. Other methods of determining the cabin status such as video cameras have been tested but are laced with problems and concerns about their usage. A wireless system allows for integration of the air marshals and provides a compromise to the countries that do not want lethal weapons or air marshals onboard the aircraft.

In fact, Congress itself has recognized the possibility that this technology presents. The Aviation Transportation Security Act (ATSA) directed the FAA to “revise procedures” for communicating between the cockpit and aircraft cabin. Then in March 2002, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), recommended that all international carriers provide flight attendants with a discreet, wireless communication device. In December 2002, the Homeland Security Act gave the TSA the ability to require discreet, wireless communication devices for flight attendants. And the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 included the requirement that the TSA conduct a study on the technology and ability to install such a wireless communication system.

Unfortunately, as with our training, neither TSA, nor the FAA have taken any actions to try and provide such a communications system, even after repeated requests from Congress that something be done. In fact, the FAA has taken the position that there is no

need for additional technology or communication devices onboard the aircraft. They believe that teaching flight attendants and pilots a secret knock, followed by a code word is sufficient enough method to communicate that an attack of some sort is taking place. I am not joking, even though I sincerely wish I was.

Madame Chair and members of this Subcommittee, it is unfortunate that I appear before you today, six years after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 – six years after our colleagues were among the very first victims on that day – to tell you that little has changed since that day. I wish I could tell you differently, but I can't. We have tried repeatedly to get Congress, the TSA and our employers to take the action necessary. Those efforts have been repeatedly thwarted. While air marshals are on more flights and pilots are barricaded behind reinforced doors and provided with lethal weapons to protect themselves those most at risk, and those most able to act in the aircraft cabin to defend their passengers and the aircraft, have been provided little tools. I want to ask Congress – even if a cockpit is protected and the pilots land the aircraft successfully, while everyone in the passenger cabin is dead, have the terrorists still not achieved their goal to wreak havoc and bring terror back into our lives?

The 9-11 Commission report highlighted numerous acts of bravery on that terrible day. It highlighted the heroic and professional acts performed by the many flight attendants on those four hijacked flights even in the light of seeing their devoted flying partners brutally murdered. It drew special attention to how the flight attendants on those flights acted in the best interests of their passengers and “took action outside the scope of their training” to do what they could to relay information and to protect those passengers and themselves. I can assure you that the flight attendants I know and represent would do the same thing again today when confronted with such a situation. However, I beg you to please help make a similar repeat of that day a little less likely, by giving us the tools and training we need.

Thank you for having the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.